

WSDOT Commerce Corridor Feasibility Study

Q&A Sheet

What is the Commerce Corridor Feasibility Study?

The purpose of this study is to determine the financial, environmental and cultural feasibility of private sector involvement in the planning or possible construction of a potential commerce corridor between Canada and Lewis County. The study results will provide the Legislature with information to help it determine whether the idea should be advanced for further study and consideration. The current study is conceptual only. The timeframe focuses on the needs in the next 20 to 50 years.

What the Feasibility Study isn't

This study does not mean the conceptual Commerce Corridor is a "done deal." It is not designed to determine the path of any future Commerce Corridor that could come to being. It is not a means of soliciting private investors or funding in any future expression of the conceptual Corridor. This study is not related to the past project popularly known as "I-605;" in fact, it differs from the previous "I-605" study in many ways.

What is a commerce corridor?

The concept of a corridor is that of a north-south, limited-access corridor that could offer additional capacity for truck and passenger traffic as well as accommodate rail and utilities. The intent is that the corridor would begin in Lewis County and extend north to the Canadian border, and that it must be developed, financed, designed, constructed, and operated by private sector consortiums. The geographic breadth of such a corridor – even if all elements were included – would be dramatically less than the rumored five-mile width.

Why is the State conducting this study?

Transportation demand is up. Freight shipment volumes are growing. Interstate 5 is at or near capacity, and rail is at, near or over capacity. The current system is aging. With these and other variables in mind, the Legislature has directed WSDOT to:

- Develop a way to define and evaluate feasibility
- Determine what project features are needed for the corridor (rail, utility, road, etc.)
- Develop preliminary cost ranges associated with the project
- Research the legal and statutory issues associated with such a project
- Identify potential environmental issues
- Outline potential community issues and strategies to address them

Who decided the State should conduct this study?

Based on input from constituents, businesses, other governmental agencies and topic experts, the Legislature determined funds should be set aside for this study.

What is being studied?

Multiple issues are being studied at this preliminary stage:

- Financial, both the costs associated with creating a corridor and the potential interest level from investors
- Features, what should be included in the project? Rail? A utility corridor? A road for freight traffic? A rail line for passenger and/or freight transit? A pedestrian or bike path?
- Environmental issues, what features are there along the potential corridor path, how might they be handled and what would the associated costs be?
- Legal and statutory, are there any regulations or laws to be aware of, how might they be handled, what would those costs look like?
- Community issues, how might a commerce corridor impact a community, what are some ways to deal with those impacts, what could particular solutions cost?

What will come out of this study?

At the study's conclusion, the Legislature will receive a report designed to give it a deeper understanding of the various issues involved in creating a Commerce Corridor. This final report will also state, given a defined set of variables, whether or not the study team has determined the project to be feasible. The report will cover financial issues, what features (rail, utility, vehicular traffic, pedestrian/bike traffic, etc) are viable for inclusion, what potential environmental issues could encompass, what legal and statutory issues are involved in such a project, and what community issues could be affected by this conceptual Corridor.

When will the Commerce Corridor be built?

The Commerce Corridor is conceptual only at this point. This study is meant to take into account transportation needs in the coming half century. At this point in the research process, it is impossible to speculate when or whether this conceptual Corridor can or will ever take shape.

How will the Commerce Corridor link with other transportation projects in the state?

The current concept is for the Commerce Corridor to link with Interstate 5 in Lewis County to the South and Whatcom County to the North. This research project will consider incorporating elements of existing and projected transportation routes and projects. One example of this could be utilizing or expanding existing rail routes.

Why is the State researching the possibility for private sector involvement?

Existing tax revenues aren't enough to meet projected demands for transportation facilities. WSDOT is exploring the idea of using private funding for projects that benefit the public. Part of this Commerce Corridor study is to determine the level of interest private parties may have in being part of this conceptual project.

Has this been studied before?

Although some segments of this conceptual Corridor may have been involved in other preliminary studies, the Commerce Corridor in its current iteration is a new concept for Washington State. Similar corridors have been studied and built in other parts of the United States. This study is not related to the past project popularly known as "I-605;" in fact, it differs from the previous "I-605" study in several ways. For example, "I-605" had a considerably shorter north-south geographic reach, involved only vehicular traffic and would have been publicly funded. The current concept for this Corridor involves a longer north-south geographic reach, includes multiple modes (vehicular, rail, utility) and would be paid for with private funds.

Where should people send their comments or questions?

If you have any comments or questions regarding this project, please contact any of the following:

Barbara Ivanov, WSDOT Project Manager, 360.705.7931,
ivanovb@wsdot.wa.gov

Dan O'Neal, Steering Committee Chair, 360.275.9411,
danoneal@wavecable.com

Senator Tim Sheldon, Steering Committee Member, 360.786.7668,
sheldon_ti@leg.wa.gov

Senator Dan Swecker, Steering Committee Member, 360.786.7638,
swecker_da@leg.wa.gov

Representative Doug Ericksen, Steering Committee Member,
360.786.7980,ericksen_do@leg.wa.gov

Representative Geoff Simpson, Steering Committee Member, 360.786.7918,
simpson_ge@leg.wa.gov

If you would prefer to talk with your district's legislators but are uncertain of their contact information, go to www1.leg.wa.gov/Legislature and type in your home address under the "Your District Finder" feature. Or you can call the legislative hotline toll-free at 1.800.562.6000.